

Mimulus Memo



JUNE 2023

CONTENTS

Part 2: Ynés Mexía (1870-1938) - 1
President's Message - 4
Conservation Tidbits - 5
Upcoming Events - 5
Garden Tour 2023 - 6
Appreciation - 7

EVENTS

JUNE
15 – Meeting/Potluck 6 – 8:30 pm

JULY & AUGUST
No Meetings

SEPTEMBER
21 – Meeting 6 – 8:30pm

OCTOBER
19 – Meeting 6 – 8:30 pm

NOVEMBER
16 – Meeting 6 – 8:30 pm

Part Two :

Ynés Enriquetta Julietta Mexía (1870-1938)

by Nancy Nies

THE GLINDA FACTOR WEBSITE HONORS MANY REMARKABLE, inspiring women who have drawn upon the power within themselves to make significant contributions to history in ten different areas. It lists Ynés Mexía and her story under the heading “*Super Scientists*.” She could, however, just as well have been listed under two of the other headings: “*Audacious Adventurers*” and “*Culture Changers*.”

Audacious Adventurer

In 1937 the Sierra Club Bulletin published “*Camping on the Equator*,” Ynés Mexía’s account of her 1934-35 expedition to Ecuador and Colombia, to find a legendary 200-foot Andean wax palm of the genus *Ceroxylon*, which grew at a high elevation and was of great interest to American botanists. The expedition would prove harrowing for Ynés, her assistant, and their local guide. They hiked in oppressive heat; slogged through thick mud, bushwhacked their way through steep-walled ravines; endured pouring rain and dropping temperatures; camped in a bog; and witnessed an earthquake and active volcanoes. As if all that were not enough, Ynés, in pain from having accidentally ingested poisonous berries, for which the native people fortunately supplied a remedy— a chicken feather down the throat to bring the berries back up!

Ynés reportedly took all of the trip’s challenges in stride. When her companions wanted to turn back, she made them a hot stew, devised a shelter where they could wait out the storm, and convinced them to continue on. Despite its trials and tribulations, the expedition was successful. **Kate Siber** writes, in “*How Finding Rare Plants Saved Ynés Mexía’s Life*” (Outside Online, Feb. 19, 2019), that one day, having climbed a terrifyingly steep mountain path, “*Mexía rounded a bend and saw, at last, her grail. A noble wax palm rose out of the earth, its spray of fronds soaring*



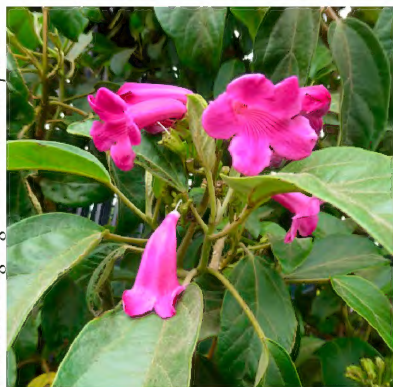
Ceroxylon quindiuense (wax palm), the world’s tallest palm and Colombia’s national tree. In 1934-35 Ynés Mexía made an expedition to Ecuador and Colombia to find this high-altitude wax palm, known to reach 200 feet in height.

Photo : Dick Culbert, Wikimedia Commons.

over the rest of the canopy, its white trunk stark against the understory's gloom." Here is an excerpt from Ynés Mexía's own account: "I photographed the great spathe and flower-cluster, so heavy that the two men could

hardly lift it; made measurements and notes; and took portions of the great arching fronds . . . Then we started on the long journey back, arriving after dark, very tired, very hot, very dirty, but very happy. . ."

To get an idea of the kind of country Ynés Mexía often explored in South America, and see one of the flowering plants she discovered there — *Delostoma integrifolium* — watch a three-minute video in Spanish here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eigT2ArO-YQ>



Delostoma integrifolium (also known as *Delostoma roseum*). A specimen of *Delostoma integrifolium* was collected by Ynés Mexía in Ambato, Tungurahua, Ecuador, 20 December 1934.

Culture Changer

Like other women botanists of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Ynés was a woman ahead of her time. Kate Siber writes that Mexía's unconventional behavior frequently shocked people she met on her travels, who were not used to seeing a woman traveling alone, astride a horse and wearing knickers, and who preferred to sleep outside. Field-work was considered rugged, dirty work unsuited to women, who were instead encouraged to carry out

their studies in libraries and laboratories.

Jess Romeo quotes historian **Pamela Henson** on the obstacles women in Mexía's time faced if they wished to enter a scientific field: "Male scientists objected to women in the field because they feared they would lower the level of scientific discourse. . . [W]omen also had to confront popular notions about the tropics as an inappropriate place for women." Though Ynés Mexía's Amazon account mentions being tracked by jaguars and confronted by indigenous tribes armed with spears, she remained fearless. When a prominent male plant-collector contemporary declared that a woman could not travel alone in Latin America, her response was: "In all my travels, I've never been attacked by a wild animal, lost my way or caught a disease. . . I don't think there's any place in the world where a woman can't venture."

Ynés continued to travel and do the work she loved until the end of her life. It was on an expedition in Oaxaca, Mexico, in 1938, that she became ill and had to return to the U.S. She died a month later, diagnosed with lung cancer. In her 13-year career, says **The Ethogram's Science Heroes** column, she not only became one of the most celebrated botanists and most prolific plant collectors of her time, but also "paved the way for future women scientists to don their field clothes and traverse the muddy and exciting paths of field biology."

Memories of Mexía

Upon Mexía's death, **William E. Colby**, then-secretary of the Sierra Club, wrote of her: "All who knew Ynés Mexía could not fail to be impressed by her friendly unassuming spirit, and by that rare courage which enabled her to travel, much of the time alone, in lands where few would dare to follow." Mexía's knowledge of the Spanish language, as well as the cultures and environments of Latin America, was also a great help to other researchers, said botanist **Thomas Harper**

Undated photo; location and photographer unknown. Photo courtesy of the Archives of the California Academy of Sciences.



Ynés Mexía on horseback. She often shocked people she met, who were not used to seeing a woman traveling alone, astride a horse, wearing knickers.



Alice Eastwood, circa 1910. Eastwood (1859-1953) was Mexía's friend and mentor, and they often went on collecting trips in California together.

Photo: Public domain, Wikimedia Commons.

Goodspeed, who traveled with her in the Andes. “She was the explorer type and happiest when independent and far from civilization. She always made light of the privations and dangers,” said Goodspeed.

Renowned botanist **Alice Eastwood** (1859-1953), botanical collection director at the **California Academy of Sciences**, called Ynés Mexía “one of the most remarkable women of the world.” Botanist and taxonomist **John Thomas Howell** (1903-1994), Eastwood’s assistant, in personal correspondence from 1980, remembered: “In 1933 she accompanied Miss Eastwood and me on the first Eastwood and Howell collecting expedition . . . in an open Model T Ford, that traversed parts of Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and California. . . and netted over 1300 collection numbers. . . Mrs. Mexía was to me a dear good friend.”

Photo by Dick Culbert, 4 January 2012. Wikimedia Commons.



Hypericum laricifolium (known locally as romarillo). This plant, a native of the high meadows of the Andes, was photographed in Cayambe-Coca National Park, Pichincha, Ecuador.

Lasting Legacy

In the article “Ynés Mexía: Botanical Trailblazer,” Jess Romeo summarizes in one sentence what made possible Mexía’s prodigious contribution to science: “[She] fought against the harshness of both nature and society to follow her passion for plant collecting.” In “Adventure, Botany, & Conservation: The ABCs of Ynés Mexía” (Picture a Scientist blog, Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Aug. 31, 2021), **Manasvi Verma** writes that in Mexía’s era, when botanical field work was considered inappropriate and dangerous for a woman, her “unwavering commitment to her mission led her to become a celebrated botanist whose specimens are studied to this day.”

Eighty-five years after her death, curators are still working to finish cataloguing her plant specimens, and still gathering new information from them about the plant diversity in the areas where she collected. The Ethogram’s *Science Heroes* column states: “These plant specimens, are just one legacy of Mexican-American botanist Ynés Mexía. . . Just as enduring a legacy is her demonstration that no environment is too wild for a woman field biologist, and that no age is too old to embark on a career as a scientist.” She occasionally employed indigenous guides, and, according to the National Park Service, “advocated for indigenous rights in the areas [where] she collected, valuing their knowledge, perspective, and right to the land.” The NPS website calls her “assertive, brave, and not afraid to challenge racism, sexism, ageism and more in her impressive and amazing career.” To watch a ten-minute video on Ynés Mexía, part of PBS’s **Unladylike2020** documentary series, go to: <https://unladylike2020.com/watch/>.

I can think of no better way to conclude than with this quote from Manasvi Verma’s article: “Ynés Mexía was a pioneer. Traveling from icy mountains in Alaska to violent volcanoes in Colombia for the sake of scientific progress is rare; for a woman of color, over the age of 50, in the 1900s, it was unheard of. Nevertheless, she persisted, and her tireless collection, preservation, and documentation of biodiversity is an inspiration. As the environmental crisis constrains civilization, Mexía’s legacy is now more important than ever. It reminds us to persevere in the face of adversity and to stop at nothing to accomplish our mission.” 🌸

Public domain, Wikimedia Commons.

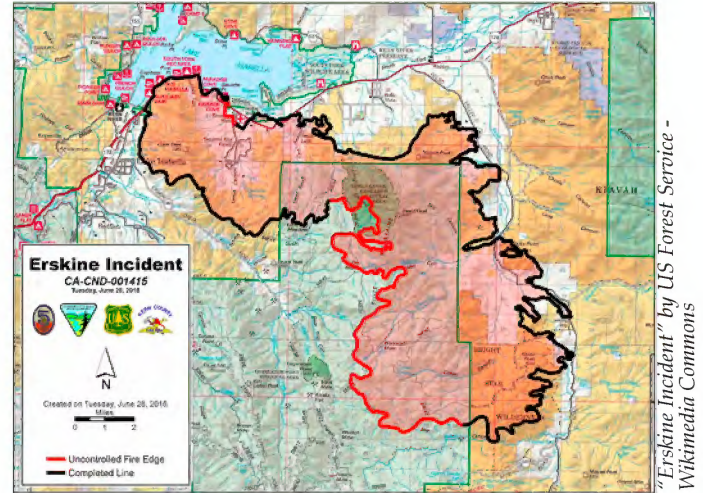


This specimen of *Hypericum laricifolium* was collected by Ynés Mexía on 29 December 1934 on Mt. Pichincha in the volcano-rich province of Pichincha, Ecuador. The collector noted that the shrub was one meter tall, had orange-yellow flowers, and occurred frequently.

President's Message: Field Trip to Long Canyon

by Rich Spjut

I VISITED LONG CANYON ON MAY 14, 2023 led by **Courtney Matzke**; she in her vehicle, and me in mine. I was hoping to see greasewood (*Forsydia* (*Glossopetalon* in TJM2, but see *Mimulus Memo* Jan 2020) and other limestone species; however, it appeared that the **June 2016 Erskine Fire Incident** may have impacted vegetation in Long Canyon more than in other areas in the Piute Mountains region. There was an unusual abundance of fire shrub survivors such as *Eriodictyon trichocalyx* and *Ceanothus leucodermis*. *Juniperus californica* was frequent in some areas of the canyon especially in the south end.



Above: Outline of area impacted by **Erskine Fire** in June 2016. Red line denotes "uncontrolled".



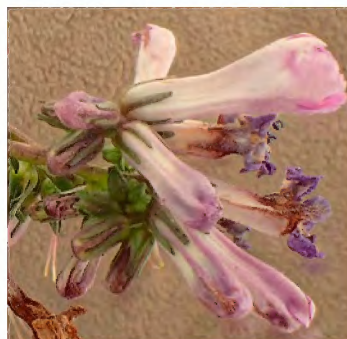
Above, both images: Long Canyon looking north to Lake Isabella. **Left:** South end of limestone hill can be seen on east side, *Fremontodendron* showing yellow flowers, *Ceanothus leucodermis* low shrubs with white flowers and *Ephedra viridis* in lower right corner. **Right:** Showing the dominant *Eriodictyon trichocalyx*.

An interesting find is *Purshia glandulosa* with a gynoecium of two individual separate carpels. The *Purshia gynoecium* usually has just one carpel. A two-carpelled gynoecium has been reported for this species, but it is rare (McMinn 1939, *Illus. Man. Calif. Shrubs*). And while this was the first time I have seen a multi-carpelled gynoecium in California *Purshia*, I had earlier reported 2-3 carpelled gynoecia in *P. tridentata* for plants observed in southwestern Colorado and Wyoming (*Mimulus Memo*, Sep 2016). Although I could say

more about other species observed in Long Canyon, I will leave it to Courtney Matzke, a student at **California Botanic Garden** working on her MA degree, to present her observations on rare plants in Long Canyon and elsewhere in the Piute Mountains. She is scheduled to be a guest speaker at our October 2023 monthly meeting. 🌸



Photos by Richard Spjut except as otherwise noted.



Above, left: *Purshia glandulosa* - low growing shrub in Long Canyon. **Above, right:** showing two separate carpels in one flower in early stage of fruit development; all flowers on the plant appeared to have two carpels.

Far left: *Eriodictyon trichocalyx* distinguished by hairs on calyx (tricho + calyx).

Near right: *E. californicum* (no calyx hairs).

Conservation-related Tidbits:

by Fred Chynoweth

DELORES CHAN IS THE NEW NATALIE Hopkins Intern at CNPS. She is a master's student at UCSB, getting her degree in environmental science and management, specializing in conservation planning and economics, policy and the environment. She will work under Nick Jensen in conservation work.



Natalie Hopkins was a mentor for women in plant sciences. She earned advanced science degrees later in life. She led the effort to digitally catalogue 15,000 plant specimen sheets and became curator of the **Sharsmith Herbarium**. Her grant is for advancing conservation of California wildlands.



Each month chapters discuss challenges facing conservation of native habitats. Here is one recent, favorable outcome:

A judge has ordered Los Angeles County to set aside its approval of **Tejon Ranch's Centennial Project**, a sprawling housing development that would bring 57,000 residents to the fire-prone outskirts of the county. The judge concluded that the environmental review for Centennial had violated the **California Environmental Quality Act** by failing to assess and mitigate climate impacts and wildfire risks of building 19,000 homes in a remote area 65 miles north of downtown Los Angeles. The project, set to cover thousands of acres of rare wildflower fields and native grasslands, was challenged by the **Center for Biological Diversity** and CNPS. *(The project still is not dead.)*



Since the release of **Pathways 30X30 Strategy** in April 2022, around 631,000 acres of land have been added. Visit [Power in Nature](https://www.powerinnature.org/) to learn more about California's **30x30 Plan**. Other informative sites include good mapping tools at **California Biodiversity Network** (<https://cabiodiversitynetwork.org/>), and **CA Nature** (<https://www.californianature.ca.gov/>).



A **San Joaquin Valley 30x30 Regional Group** in the **Power In Nature Coalition** was formed to include many interested groups representing varied Central Valley interests. It is headed by **Barbara Brydolf** from the **Alta Peak Chapter** and helped to promote \$40 million in the state budget for floodplain restoration in the San Joaquin Valley. 🌱

Chapter Meetings

upcoming TOPICS

Thursday, June 15, 2023 - 6:30 pm

Presenter: Raeyana Ross

Topic: Kern Nature Center

Potluck to follow

Thursday, 21 September 2023 - 7 pm

Presenter: TBA

Thursday, 19 October 2023 - 7 pm

Presenter: TBA

Thursday, 16 November 2023 - 7 pm

Presenter: Greg Warrick, CNLM,

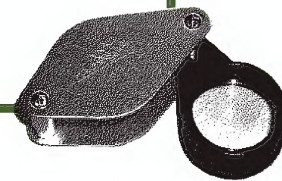
Topic: Sand Ridge

Meeting times:

All IN-PERSON chapter meetings are held the **3rd Thursday** of each month from **6 – 8:30 pm**:

6 pm - Socializing, plant ID and gardening discussion groups, followed at **7 pm** by program presentation and concluding with a short business meeting.

Suggestions? Contact **Paul Gipe** (pgipe@igc.org). 🌱



FOUND*: Only Known Population of Rare Plant

IN MAY, CNPS AND THE SANTA Barbara Botanic Garden announced the "rediscovery" of a native plant species not documented in almost 30 years. Prior to the new finding, the **Santa Ynez groundstar** (*Ancistrocarphus keilii*, CRPR 1B.1) was known only from very old records and few occurrences.

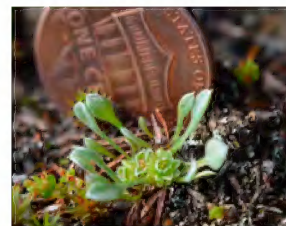


Photo: Kristen Nelson

The **Santa Ynez groundstar** is smaller than a penny.

The collaborators pieced together records from old data and obtained permits to search the last place it was known to have existed — Vandenberg Space Force Base. 🌱

*Information from CNPS website, [recent stories](#).

Garden Tour 2023!

by Monica Tudor

WE WERE SO LUCKY TO HAVE SUCH A gorgeous day for a garden tour! It was sunny, not too hot, and just perfect for a group of like-minded gardeners who had gathered for the 2023 garden tour.

We met at the home of **Marcia and Rey Rodriguez**. Marcia had attended the “*Ditch Your Lawn*” class in fall of 2022 and went all-in. Their native garden

was less than a year old, and although it might have looked sparse at the moment, it was perfectly planted to give space when the plants matured. The Rodri-



The Rodriguezes' yard with plenty of space for maturing plants.

guezes had a traditional grass yard with traditional flower beds surrounding the house. They liked their traditional flower beds surrounding their home and kept them, but went native on the rest of the front yard. They planted **deer grass, Palo Verde trees, western redbud, white sage, bees bliss sage, blue eyed grass, pseudospectabilis penstemon** (the pink-flowered kind), and a few other natives. They used weed barrier and small bark chips as mulch. Rey was a wonderful host as he described their garden.

Next, we went to the home of **Paul Gipe and Nancy Nies**. Since their yard is sloped, they had retaining walls installed. Their garden had been installed over a year ago and was designed by **Fred Simon***. Their front and back yard gardens are beautiful,



Above: Monica, addressing the tour group in Paul and Nancy's yard. **Below:** Paul standing in front of some of the retaining walls built to accommodate their front yard slope.

with an impressive and pleasing variety of native plants. They planted **lupine, heuchera, salvia, deer grass, desert marigold, ceanothus**, and more. Paul and Nancy answered all our questions while we ooh'd and ahhh'd over their garden. Then Paul suggested we walk down to **Gitika Commuri's** garden, since it was just a few blocks away.

Below: Walking to the Commuri garden.





Above: Gitika's yard as it faces the street with poppies, nasturtium, lantana and mallow. **Below:** Mallow.

So the lot of us trooped down the streets of the neighborhood, noting and commenting on some nice gardens on the way to Gitika's house. Gitika's garden is also on a slope and is a riot of color! Her garden combines natives with non-natives and she takes a low-maintenance approach to gardening. She has **nasturtium, succulents, salvia, iris, poppies, sunflowers, santolina** and more. She waters infrequently in the summer and explained some plants will go dormant in the summer sun but will return when the rains fall. As she shared some succulents with us, she commented she thoroughly enjoyed the company and our visit made for a great day for her. ☀

*Fred Simon, 661-322-1381
fredsimonasa@yahoo.com

*Thank
You
to...*

- ... Megan Means for teaching us about Atwell Island.
- ... Peyton Ellas for the story of her starting Blue Oak Nursery in Springville.
- ... Brandon Dunn for sharing plans for the exciting Kern Gateway Trail.
- ... **Monica Tudor** for arranging the details of the 2023 Garden Tour.
- ... **Rey and Marcia Rodriguez, Nancy Nies, Paul Gipe and Gitika Commuri** for sharing their gardens. ☀



CALIFORNIA
NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

CNPS is the leader for providing reliable information on California native plants and plant conservation. Comprehensive information about California's flora and vegetation communities is available throughout the state for conservation and educational purposes. CNPS's leadership influences personal ethics and actions, as well as public policy for native plant protection.

Contacts:

President – Rich Spjut.....richspjut@gmail.com
 Vice President – Sabrina Mehtabuddin..sabrina.mehtabuddin@gmail.com
 Coordinator – Paul Gipe pgipe@igc.org
 Treasurer – Monica Tudor dosportas@msn.com
 Secretary – Sabrina Mehtabuddin..sabrina.mehtabuddin@gmail.com
 Conservation – Fred Chynoweth.....rdumnt18@gmail.com
 Council Delegate – Rich Spjut richspjut@gmail.com
 Field Trips OPEN
 Newsletter – Dinah Campbell mimulus.memo@gmail.com
 Plant Sale – Monica Tudor dosportas@msn.com
 Programs – Paul Gipe pgipe@igc.org
 Rich Spjut.....richspjut@gmail.com
 Publicity – OPEN
 Membership – Dinah Campbell dinah.campbell@gmail.com
 Rare Plants – Clyde Golden cgold666@hotmail.com
 Webmasters – Paul Gipe pgipe@igc.org
 – Monica Tudor.....dosportas@msn.com
 – Dinah Campbell dinah.campbell@gmail.com

The Kern Chapter of the California Native Plant Society meets the third Thursday of each month. Chapter website: kern.cnps.org

The California Native Plant Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of California native plants and their natural habitats, and to increasing the understanding, appreciation, and horticultural use of native plants.

With 31 chapters throughout the state CNPS membership is open to all – professionals and amateurs – with concern for California's native plants. Members have diverse interests including natural history, botany, ecology, conservation, photography, drawing, hiking and gardening. Your chapter membership includes Flora Magazine, a quarterly journal with interviews, conservation updates, gardening advice. Artemesia, CNPS's scientific journal and The Mimulus Memo, the Kern Chapter newsletter published January, March, June, September

Join CNPS or renew your membership online at cnps.org

Membership levels: \$25, \$50, \$120, \$500 (\$25 minimum)
Go Perennial at \$5/ month

To **unsubscribe/subscribe** to Kern CNPS email communications members should contact: membership@cnps.org (916) 738-7604

CNPS-Kern Chapter
 c/o Dinah Campbell, Editor
 2100 Jason St.
 Bakersfield, CA93309-2949
mimulus.memo@gmail.com



Mimulus Memo



Inside this Issue:

PART II: YNES MEXIA
 FIELD TRIP TO LONG CANYON
 2023 GARDEN TOUR